

VZCZCXYZ0004
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHIN #0462/01 0910858
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 310858Z MAR 08
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8601
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 8113
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 9353

UNCLAS AIT TAIPEI 000462

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DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EAP/TC, EAP/PA, EAP/PD - NIDA EMMONS
DEPARTMENT PASS AIT/WASHINGTON

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their March 29-31 news coverage on their interviews with president-election Ma Ying-jeou Friday, who talked about his views on the future of cross-strait relations, Taipei-Washington relations, and Taiwan's domestic policies; on AIT Chairman Raymond Burghardt's visit to Taiwan Friday; on Ma's interest in visiting the United States; on the "1992 consensus"; and on personnel changes in the defeated DPP.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an op-ed in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" discussed several possible pressures that Ma's election might bring about with respect to Beijing, even though Ma has promised to reduce the tensions and to reconcile with China. An editorial in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" urged both sides of the Taiwan Strait to resume dialogue with prudence and patience. An editorial in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" questioned why U.S. President George W. Bush sent a garbled message to Taipei -- namely, Bush urged Beijing and Taipei to resume dialogue in his telephone conversation with Chinese President Hu Jintao, but when AIT Chairman Burghardt was in Taipei over the weekend, he told Taipei that the United States does not want to mediate in the Taiwan issue. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," on the other hand, called the "1992 consensus" a lie created by Legislator Su Chi of the KMT, which is now able to trick the Bush administration into thinking that it ever existed. End summary.

A) "Ma Ying-jeou Brings International Pressure to Beijing"

Litai Xue, a research associate in the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University, opined in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 520,000] (3/29):

"... First, in the wake of [Taiwan's] presidential election, the relations between Washington and Beijing will tend to stabilize for a certain period of time. Changes that are expected to follow closely will be the possibility for the United States to adjust its Taiwan policy. Previously, [Washington] tended to focus on stabilizing the cross-strait situation and encouraging contact between the two sides. From now on, perhaps it will put special emphasis on preventing the momentum of quick improvement in terms of across-strait relations. Henceforth, Washington will likely adjust its policy depending on the development of the situation and start to prevent the cross-strait status quo from having a dramatic shake-up as a result of the increasingly intimate contact between the two sides. As a result, Beijing will inevitably face new pressure from the Western world. ...

"The Western countries used to be able to tolerate China's sharp and continuous increase in its military budget because Beijing had to strengthen its military buildup in preparation for the contingencies in term of cross-strait situation. In the foreseeable future, if

the threat of de jure Taiwan independence is diminished while China continues its sharp increase in its military budget to boost its new and advanced naval and air force capabilities, the United States will surely believe that the trend will sooner or later constitute a threat to the U.S. military presence in the Asia-Pacific region.
...

"Consequently, the pressure [that Beijing will face] may come from the overseas Chinese community. Over the recent years, quite a few overseas Chinese tended to support Beijing's policy against Taiwan independence primarily because of their pro-China mentality. That was partially because the DPP administration only paid attention to overseas Taiwan people and disregarded overseas Chinese. Now that the KMT has regained power, Taipei will naturally change the original nearsighted policy toward overseas Chinese. ... Taipei will continue to emphasize the huge differences between Beijing and Taipei with regard to democracy and human rights, which will be very convincing for the overseas Chinese community. ... All these will form a situation in which Beijing and Taipei are vying with each other for the centripetal force of overseas Chinese. A certain number of overseas Chinese will change their minds and take a position in favor of Taipei. As a result, Beijing will face challenges on two separate fronts when handling cross-Straits relations. ... This might be another kind of pressure Beijing will face from the outside world."

B) "Resume Dialogue across the Taiwan Strait with Prudence and Patience"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (3/31):

"... The Beijing authorities should be clearly aware that Taiwan, after being ruled by Ma Ying-jeou, will no longer manipulate cross-Straits issues in a provocative manner. In other words, at least for the next four years, the island will not frequently use

such means as writing a new constitution, rectifying the island's name, or bundling referenda with the presidential election to 'create trouble' and deliberately generate tension in the region. But for Ma, no matter how 'pragmatic' he seeks to be, cannot possibly 'turn a blind eye' to the hundreds of missile deployed by Beijing targeting Taiwan. Nor can he possibly 'sit back and watch' Taiwan's long-term situation of being excluded by international organizations. Surely he will not 'seal his lips' with regard to mainland China's human rights measures. ...

"One can say that, should the Beijing authorities expect to see any breakthroughs in the future development of cross-Straits relations, it cannot just have its leaders express goodwill via well-disposed speeches. If the military still insists on increasing the number of missiles targeting Taiwan and conducting exercises with the intent to use force against Taiwan, and if Beijing's agency in charge of foreign relations insist on luring away Taiwan's allies and continues its suppression of Taiwan's attempt to participate in the international community, the chances are slim for Beijing to expect Ma to act and think magnanimously in terms of his future cross-Straits policy."

C) "How China Can Be Reunited"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (3/30):

"Uncle Sam is sending a garbled diplomatic message to Taiwan again. President George W. Bush had a telephone conversation with his Chinese opposite number Hu Jintao last week and they were agreed Taipei should start dialogue with Beijing right away on the basis of what is known as the consensus of 1992. Then Raymond Burghardt, chairman of the American Institute in Taiwan, rushed to Taipei to meet President Chen Shui-bian and president-elect Ma Ying-jeou. Burghardt told President Chen how Taipei wants to resume dialogue with Beijing is "your own business" and reiterated the U.S. policy of playing no mediator role in talks across the Taiwan Strait at a roundtable discussion organized by the local press. ...

"All this means there's no need whatsoever for Hu and Bush to beat about the bush. Unless President Bush wanted to play mediator, he

had no reason for making mention of the consensus of 1992 together with Hu Jintao. Yet Bush sent Burghardt to Taipei to make it crystal clear that the United States will never mediate. ...

"So far Beijing has refused to accept the commonwealth idea. But the time seems to have come for an increasingly confident China to change its mind. For one thing, it's up to Beijing to determine if the people of an area or region of China are accustomed to "parliamentary rule" and to grand dominion status after it has so determined. It doesn't have to fear Taiwan may set a precedent for Tibet or Chinese Turkistan or Hong Kong that may clamor for similar status. They have to take more, much more, time to get accustomed to democracy. On the other hand, it will be really cost-effective to have them join a future commonwealth. The People's Republic doesn't have to deploy huge armies in those regions, while enjoying all the economic benefits that accrue when the commonwealth is formed. ..."

D) Hypnotism and the '1992 Consensus'"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (3/29):

"If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, White House security advisers will eventually come to believe it. So it is with the stubborn myth of the '1992 consensus' between Taiwan and China, which now has the distinction of tricking Stephen Hadley, national security adviser to US President George W. Bush, into thinking that it ever existed. ... The '1992 consensus' has new impetus today partly because of its utility for the incoming administration of president-elect Ma Ying-jeou and partly because the DPP has been characteristically inept in highlighting its fictional birth. With the highest US officials now subscribing to this mythology, the ramifications of this ineptitude are plain to see. ...

"These days, it seems, fiction has a role to play in cross-strait affairs if it fits the template of peaceful deference to Chinese sensibilities. For Hadley's benefit, it should be said that Su [Chi] is no stranger to creative tweaking of reality. He had a role to play in the dissemination to the US Congress of the 'Bulletgate' leaflet composed by KMT think tank members. This ham-fisted propaganda campaign meant to serve as a framework for the pan-blue-camp fantasy that the assassination attempt on Chen and the vice president on the eve of the 2004 presidential election was staged. ..."

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